

Washington - Congresswoman Linda Sánchez, Chairwoman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law, today issued the following response to an editorial written by U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales on the Bush Administration's recent firing of at least 8 U.S. Attorneys.

"After months of evasions and excuses on the question of whether eight former U.S. Attorneys were fired to achieve a political agenda, I was surprised to read this morning that Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has added to the growing list of excuses - that he fired the federal prosecutors because they had "lost [his] confidence.

"Yesterday, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law (CAL), which I chair, held a hearing on the issue, which yielded very interesting testimony. Former U.S. Attorneys Daniel Bogden from Nevada and Paul Charlton from Arizona testified that Acting Associate Attorney General William Mercer told them that the prosecutors were fired to help Republican loyalists "build their resumes.

"Principal Assistant Deputy Attorney General William Moschella, testifying for the Justice Department, admitted that U.S. Attorney H.E. Cummins III of Arkansas was fired to give Timothy Griffin - a former aide to White House advisor Karl Rove - "a chance to serve his country." Moschella also said that other U.S. Attorneys were fired to make room for "new blood."

"These reasons, while interesting, do not fall in line with what the Bush Administration told us previously. Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty offered the now widely discredited line that the prosecutors were fired for performance-related reasons; this may be troubling for McNulty given that he was testifying to our colleagues in the Senate when he said it.

"My personal favorite excuse - also from McNulty - is that some U.S. Attorneys were fired because of "extensive Congressional concern." I can tell you that Democrats have been expressing extensive concern to the Justice Department for years on issues like the warrantless wiretap program and military tribunals, but we've had no such luck in spurring action. How can we get that phone number?

"It is curious that Attorney General Gonzales has called the speculation as to the real reasons for the firing "wild and inaccurate." Anyone listening through the hearing yesterday may have concluded that various explanations offered by Mr. Gonzales's deputies were "wild and inaccurate." I wonder what excuses we will hear tomorrow.

"House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers and I are determined to cut through the various excuses and get to the truth. We are following up on our requests to the Justice Department for information on numerous aspects of this issue, and we will almost certainly hold further proceedings as we consider H.R. 580, a bill by Rep. Howard Berman to restore checks and balances to the U.S. Attorney selection process."